



Society of
the Sacred Heart
of Jesus

OPENING CONFERENCE
PROBATION 2022-2023

November 3, 2022

If you knew the gift of God...!



I am so happy to welcome you – Eni, Alicja, Barbara, Fili, Kata, Linda and Jola – on behalf of the RSCJ who live in Rome, on behalf of the Central Team and on behalf of the whole Society who is praying for you as you begin this time as a probation community here at the Villa Lante.

Each probation is special with its own particular characteristics. Over the next months you will discover the uniqueness of your probation experience and, at some point, will help us give you your name and a devise which you will carry with you for life. Right now, we know that this is a special probation, the first to live in this newly renovated space in the Villa Lante called Betania, a space that has been especially prepared for you and for the probation communities that follow. You are also beginning probation in a special time in the Society, when the whole Society is discerning how to create something new for the sake of our mission, our life and the vitality of our Church. You are arriving here in Rome in the moment where our pope, Francis, is pushing



the global Church to live in a synodal way renewing itself through the participation of all God's people. You are about to have an amazing experience of creating an international community day by day, that crosses frontiers, languages, cultures and yet is united in a common commitment to follow Jesus Christ as Religious of the Sacred Heart

Since Sophie's time, probation has been a key moment in each RSCJ's life as well as an experience which is central to the unity and vitality of the Society. Probation is a time of deepening and confirming your call to the Society, coming together as women ready to make your life commitment to Jesus Christ in the Society of the Sacred Heart in the context of an intentional international community. But probation is not just a personal moment for you as an individual RSCJ. Sophie was passionate about creating, sustaining and growing the *Cor Unum* of our religious community. Probation is an experience of *Cor Unum* and an essential part of you being co-creators of the Society now and into the future. Sophie's choice of our motto *Cor Unum et Anima Una in Corde Jesu*, the very words you will wear on your heart when you receive your profession cross, imprints upon you and each of us the relationship among us as sisters with Jesus Christ as our center.

I would like to share three things with you as you begin probation – something about the image you received, something about Rome and the Villa Lante and then a short prayer from each of us on the Central Team to launch you into this important moment.

About the Image

Thanks to your probation team, Clara and Christine, you have been given a modern-day icon to accompany you during these days of probation, the image of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. Over the last several weeks, I have been praying over this passage for you as you begin this time of probation. More and more I realize that we each meet Jesus "along the way" not all in the same way or in the same timeframe. I can be a rather slow person myself and I continue to learn how to meet Jesus in the unique way in which I am invited and called, to be patient, to be present, to be open.

I have come to know that Jesus is always ready and waiting to meet me and us along His way, as He met so many people when He walked from place to place in His own land. We are each invited to stop at the well, to meet Jesus, to pause and enter into a conversation, to listen and to share the truth of ourselves without fear.

In some ways, this story of an encounter between Jesus and the woman from Samaria is each of our stories and particularly your story during these next months.

When the Samaritan woman met Jesus she listened to His question "Will you give me a drink?" Surely she asked herself, "What is Jesus thirsty for? What is there in me that can quench Jesus' thirst? what can I offer Him?" I hope that during this time of probation you can quench your thirst



in the Heart of Jesus and at the same time find an answer to this request of Jesus that will lead you to go deep into the well of your being, where it is sometimes difficult for us to enter.

During this time, you will unwrap and unfold the meaning of this image for yourselves, each one of you with her own experience of the encounter of Jesus with the woman from Samaria, each one of you with your own experience of meeting Jesus here in the Villa Lante and here in Rome. This is the place where you will find your own spring of Living Water ready to quench the thirst of others on the way, the thirst of our world and your own thirst. This is the gift of probation, an opportunity that will not come again, a free gift from Sophie and the Society to you.

About the place

The place where you are called to live this probation is the Villa Lante in Rome. It is a gift to be here at the Villa Lante and maybe a little bit of a miracle that the space is relatively ready for you. Despite the construction, you can walk in the garden, knowing that your feet are walking the same path that Sophie and her companions walked. While the big chapel is still under renovation, I hope before you leave that Sophie's room will be available for you to pray. I urge you to find a place on this holy ground where you can open yourself up and let God speak to the depth of your being. I would call this "the place of the well" for you. This holy place can help you enter into this gifted time of prayer, reflection, rereading of your own journey, knowing that you join hundreds, maybe thousands, of RSCJ who have walked these grounds before you as well as our sister, Sophie. You will also share this space with the families and children of the Peter Pan Association, children who are here in Rome to receive treatment for serious illness. They, too, will become part of your story and touch your lives. Perhaps together this will be a time of healing for you, just as it is for them.

You will also live these months in the city of Rome, a place filled with the spirit of our global Church, a city inhabited by local Italians and multitudes of immigrants, by rich and poor and just every day folks. You will meet God's people along the river, in St. Peter's Square, perhaps along the streets of Trastevere. It is a gift to be here in Rome at a moment in the Church that is filled with life as well as challenges. Our pope, Francis, calls us to be part of a synodal church where each person has a voice, to be part of co-creating a healthy world that is a welcoming home for people of all faiths or no faith, of all states of being and ability, of different ways of life, of different ways of thinking and being. I urge you to pray for Francis and for our church during your time here. For sure you will find Jesus walking along the streets of Rome too, and will discover what God has to teach you in this place. I urge you to stop and listen and drink from the well that is the city of Rome.



Our prayer for you

Lastly, we have invited the whole Society, RSCJ and lay men and women who are committed to our mission, to pray for you during these months. I invite Marie-Jeanne, Anne, Mónica and Daphne to share with you their prayer for you and then together, we will bless you.

You have come to probation like the Samaritan woman carrying your pot – your story. In this time, I pray that you, like her, are not afraid to meet Jesus, dialogue with Him and let Him show you your truth. This then will give you the courage and freedom to go out to the whole world to share the Jesus whom you have met. (Daphne)

Many generations of RSCJ have known the house and garden of the Villa Lante. My prayer for you is that you draw deeply from the grace of their prayer and the experience of their wisdom. (Anne)

I hope that in this spiritual journey each one of you will allow yourselves to be surprised by the request of Jesus, who reveals Himself by showing His need, and that in dialogue with Him you will be able to accept your own truth, let yourselves be healed by Him and be able to get in touch with your own thirsts and deepest desires. (Mónica)

The Samaritans are a very different people in terms of their beliefs and culture; Jesus gradually abolishes this distance and makes the Samaritan woman a disciple. May this time of probation be for you a time when the Lord welcomes you into His school, a time when He will gradually let you enter the depths of His heart to learn new ways of relating to Him, to each other, and to the world. Make space for Him, let Him question you and transform you, so that you go and transform the world with your love. (Marie-Jeanne)

May the Lord bless you and keep you, may the Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, may the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen.

Barbara Dawson RSCJ
Superior General

